

## Summary of Evidence of Jos Coolen, Urban Designer

1. Kia Ora koutou, my name is Jos Coolen, I have assessed the urban design effects of the proposal. I would like to use this time to briefly highlight the three key points that form the main considerations of my provided evidence.
2. Firstly, the integration with the architectural style of the building.

The Huddart Parker Building has a very clear and clean style, consisting of a base, trunk and crown. The installation of a billboard on the roof would add a distracting element to the existing character and structure of the building.

In the legal submissions (paragraph 4.2) for the applicant it states that 'those opposing appear to have adopted a starting point that the provision of a LED sign on the building is inherently negative'.

I note that the suitability of installing a billboard on a building depends on a number of factors, including the character of the building. Some buildings will be able to accommodate an electronic billboard and others will not. I have advised on multiple proposals for a client proposing to install a number of billboards – some billboards have been installed and others we advised that the location and context for a billboard was not appropriate. My approach is to consider each proposal on its merits.

3. I disagree with the applicant's argument that the installation of a billboard is reinstating a historic condition. The WCC heritage report of the building mentions the aesthetic and social values of the past signage. I note that there are a number of significant differences between the past signage (which has consisted of a range of different types, sizes and functions over the years) and the proposed electronic billboard. In my opinion the aesthetic and social values of the proposed billboard can not be compared with any signage that has been part of the building in the past. Aesthetic differences are related to scale, solid nature, brightness and its transitional content. With regards to social values, although I appreciate the sentimental values of a time display, it would not serve the same social values as it would have done in the past, as people are not relying on a display like this for time and weather information.

The applicant notes that the installation of an electronic billboard is in line with a logical evolution of technology in signage, from static to digital. I do not agree that this can be used as an argument of why a historic condition is reinstated by using a different type of signage. The effects of an electronic billboard are significantly different than signage that has been part of the building in the past. In my evidence I linked to a number of videos that were taken from our office of the billboard on Brandon Street. It shows the effects of a digital billboard and how different it is compared to a static billboard.

4. Secondly, the visual dominance and obtrusiveness of the proposed billboard.

Not only is the billboard in many aspects incompatible with the character of the building it also adds something new to the environment that the building is located in. I would like to demonstrate this by highlighting why the dominance effects of this proposal are different than from the billboard that was installed on the Embassy Theatre.

a. The location of the Embassy Theatre already consisted of a relatively high degree of visual clutter. With visual clutter I mean the degree to which there are elements in the environment that you would not expect here. The Embassy Theatre is located at the top end of Courtenay Place, which is the main entertainment precinct in the city. It has a visually busy and colourful streetscape due to existing signage and colours of buildings. There are many different architectural styles, and there are billboards (electronic and static) in the area immediately around the cinema. The installation of a new billboard is not entirely unexpected.

The area around Post Office Square on the other hand, consists of tall office buildings and relatively low level heritage buildings. The visual character of the area is a lot cleaner as in there is a lot less visual clutter. In the evening you would expect to see office lights on, street lights, etc. There is existing signage on buildings, though all existing signs are static and predominantly associated with the occupants of the buildings. An electronic billboard of the proposed size, with transitional and commercial content would be entirely new in this environment and stand out.

b. The billboard on the Embassy Theatre is set back from the front façade, therefore leaving the main street facing façade relatively undisturbed, unlike the proposed billboard on the Huddart Parker Building which will be in line with the façade, effectively increasing its perceived height.

c. Also, the billboard on the Embassy Theatre is attached against a large blank façade and therefore not compromising any views in particular. From a distance, the proposed billboard on top of the Huddart Parker Building would be viewed against a backdrop of buildings, and from closeby (for example from the Square) would be seen against the sky. I consider that an isolated billboard that is viewed against the sky, has a higher visual dominance than when it is installed against a wall.

5. Finally, the relationship of the billboard with its surrounding context.

Post Office Square is a popular spot, and with its food stalls, seats and grassy area it is a people focussed area. I agree with the statement in the applicant's legal submissions that visitors to the Square might not perhaps look up to view the top of the building and I appreciate that these people are probably not the main target for the advertising that will be shown on the billboard.

However, that does not mean that the billboard does not have an effect on the people visiting the Square. The colours, brightness, transitions and solid nature of the billboard will affect people's experience of the Square. As mentioned earlier, these effects can not be compared to any previous signage that has been present on the building in the past due to the different natures of these past signs as was visible in the videos that I linked to in my evidence.

A Square is defined by its edges and without edges there would be not be a Square. The height of these edges contribute to the experience that visitors will have. All facades along

the southern and western edges of Post Office Square are all of a similar height (32m). The proposed billboard will be located within the same plane as the front façade of the Huddart Parker Building, effectively increasing its height. It would increase the perceived height of the building when viewed from the front and therefore disrupt a perceived pattern that currently exists.

Our urban environments are subject to change. Currently there is a big push within urban design and city planning, to give the city back to the people. Modern design is predominantly focused on the people friendliness of spaces, or like Jan Gehl calls it, the human scale. We also see this in Wellington, with many projects currently underway to support this, like the Golden Mile Improvements and the City Streets projects. Mass Rapid Transit is being discussed and you may have seen some initial renders of a light rail corridor, consistently showing Post Office Square and Huddart Parker Building as a showcase of how that could look like. In my opinion, large scale billboards do not fit within this human scale environment.

6. In conclusion, in my view, the proposed billboard is not appropriate signage for the following reasons:
  - The proposal is not reinstating a historic condition, as the installation of a digital billboard is significantly different from any signage that was part of the building in the past.
  - The proposal will introduce a number of new effects that are not compatible with the architectural style and character of the building and its immediate surroundings.
  - The billboard will introduce a distracting element into the area and will result in dominance effects on the building and Post Office Square.